

Medford Soo Line Depot
109 West State Street
City of Medford
Taylor County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI - 327

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

MEDFORD SOO LINE DEPOT

Location: 109 W. State Street (Near northwest corner of State and Main Street), Medford, Wisconsin.

Present Owner: City of Medford.

Present Use: Vacant; Optioned to Laurence J DeMark, Medford.

NOTE: The text of this exhibit is excerpted heavily from the National Register Eligibility Report prepared for the City of Medford by Susan McCue Kuester, accepted by the City on December 21, 1989.

Significance: This depot is the only remaining railroad station in Taylor County, and the third station to stand on the same site in the City of Medford. It was built by the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railroad Company (Soo Line) as a "combination first class" station, with facilities for both passenger and freight business but no living space for the depot agent. Company blueprints indicate that nearly identical stations were built at about the same time in the cities of Park Falls and Thorp, Wisconsin. Near the center of Medford's Main Street business district and close behind a line of commercial buildings, the depot and its physical setting clearly illustrate the critical link between railroad transportation and the early development of Medford. The depot marks the Wisconsin Central Railroad Company's original line from Stevens Point to Ashland, the first public transportation into Taylor County and northwestern Wisconsin, which arrived in Medford in July, 1873.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION.

A. Physical Statement.

1. Date of Erection: November, 1913.
2. Architect: Bridges & Buildings Department, Soo Line RR. Co., Minneapolis, MN.
3. Ownership: The Soo Line Railroad owned the building from the date of its construction until March 8, 1990, when the land and building were sold to the City of Medford to be used for a downtown redevelopment project. On February 4, 1992, the Medford Common Council approved the sale of the depot to Laurence J DeMark of Medford, who proposed to restore it

with historical accuracy for use as a restaurant and retail establishment. DeMark also agreed to provide space for an information counter for the newly created "Pine Line Trail" being developed on former railroad right of way by the joint Rail Trail Commission of Price and Taylor Counties.

4. Alterations: Soo Line B & B Department plan dated September 11, 1912, File M-5-0-41, plan 16045, document 3131, indicates that the depot originally rested on wood sills on 3' deep cement footing piers and had a small 7' deep cellar. At some time subsequent, the building was jacked and a poured concrete foundation was built which included an enlarged basement. The current floor slab is concrete in fair to good condition. The original construction cost was \$7,087.00: \$5,850 for construction and \$1,327 for site preparation.

About one foot of the roof overhang on the east side of the depot was cut off at an unknown date, apparently to facilitate the passage of delivery trucks. The northeast and southeast corners of the roof overhang were damaged, apparently by the same traffic. The City closed the alley along the east side of the depot shortly after it was acquired from the Soo Line in order to avoid further damage to the building.

At this writing, the depot is in poor to fair overall condition. It apparently has had no regular maintenance or renewal since the 1950's, and has been unheated since the departure of the Soo Line's Medford agent in 1985. The hot water heating system is not functional, and extensive updating and renovation will be needed to make the depot habitable for regular use.

B. Historical Context.

The Medford Centennial Book states that more than any other factor, "...The Wisconsin Central Railroad had the greatest influence on the why and wherefore of Medford's uptown and downtown locations...it seeded the mushroom which spread into a hamlet and later a city." As the first rail line into northern Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Central deserves special attention. Incorporated in 1871, WC's first division of railroad to penetrate the northern frontier was a 65-mile stretch from Menasha to Stevens Point. Under the financial leadership of eastern capitalist Gardner Colby, the company acquired more than 837,000 acres under a federal land grant. In exchange for "free" land, WC's obligation was to be the first company to link the shore of Lake Superior with the southern part of the State. Most historians agree that the WC was organized for the purpose of acquiring the wilderness lands, because the railroad promoters sold the land to lumbermen as soon as they had acquired it. The lands north of

Stevens Point were often referred to as "The Pinery" and were sparsely settled in the early 1870's. Thus, construction of the Wisconsin Central through the north country generally preceded settlement by Europeans. Like many northern Wisconsin towns, Medford owes its origins to the Wisconsin Central Railroad.

The WC began laying rails northwest of Stevens Point in early 1872, completing its line as far as Colby in September of that year. At the same time, crews cleared a path north to the Black River. The first train passed through what now is Medford in July, and the first depot was erected in September of 1873. W.B. Jeffers, the first depot agent, and two other persons were the sole permanent residents of Medford in the winter of 1873. The name "Medford" was selected to recognize the home town in Massachusetts of one of the railroad's investors. In the Spring of 1874, the Wisconsin Central built a 7-room guest house for prospective German and Swiss buyers of railroad farm lands. This "immigrant house" located near what is now Main and Lincoln Streets in Medford may have been the only instance of the railroad company giving free shelter to prospective land buyers. (Rosholt, p.92). Wisconsin Central donated a 316' x 500' land parcel just east of the depot to Taylor County for the site of the Taylor County Courthouse (NRHP).

Timber and agriculture became the primary attractions for early Medford. By 1875, Taylor County's first sawmill shipped 1,500,000 board feet of lumber, requiring 291 freight cars from the Medford depot. In June, 1877, Wisconsin Central completed its line from Stevens Point through Medford to Ashland on the south shore of Lake Superior. By 1880, Medford's population had grown to 2,311.

Medford experienced a destructive fire on May 28, 1885, which started in the log Fredericks Hotel near the depot and spread to many pine frame buildings along the Black River. The town had no fire fighting equipment and only one brick building. The Wisconsin Central station agent telegraphed for help. WC crews in Stevens Point, 71 miles from Medford, loaded fire engines onto freight cars to forward to Medford, but the fire had been burning for 9 hours before they arrived. The engineer had raced the train so hard from Stevens Point that the locomotive's right front wheel "melted off as the train arrived at Division Street." By the time the fire was extinguished, the Company Store and Music Hall were the only buildings left standing in what was downtown Medford. The little depot had been one of the first buildings destroyed by the fire. From 1885 until 1911, Medford had to make do with only a boxcar placed on its former depot site.

The Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railway

acquired control of the Wisconsin Central Railroad in 1908, and integrated its operation with the Soo Line under a lease agreement on January 1, 1909. This continued into the 1960's, when the old WC corporation was merged into Soo Line and passed from existence. The present Wisconsin Central Ltd. which owns the rail line to Medford is a new entity with no direct ties to the original Wisconsin Central Railroad Company.

On November 29, 1911, the Soo Line was ordered by the Wisconsin Railroad Commission to:

"...provide a station building at Medford which shall be reasonably adequate for passenger and freight traffic at the station...July 1, 1912 is deemed as reasonable date not later than which said station will be open." (Medford Star News, 12/1/11).

Soo Line representatives Potter and Erbens met with the Medford Common Council in August, 1912, to present plans for enlarging their present depot. While the Council pushed for a new brick structure, the Soo delegation offered a wood addition or nothing. The Council voted to accept a wood depot.

"Additions will be built on the north end of the present depot and of the same width. The south 30' will be the men's waiting room. The office will remain where it is, but 6 feet will be taken for a washroom. North of the office will be a 16 x 17 foot ladies' waiting room. Next to this will be a warm room and at the north end will be a 42 x 17 foot freight room." (Star News, 8/9/12).

This depot was to measure 17 x 60 feet overall, and construction was to cost \$4,567.00. However, on October 10, 1912, at 7:30 p.m., an explosion at the depot engulfed the entire building in flames. T.A. Burger had been inspecting a barrel of gasoline on the east platform near the north end of the depot, when the "gaseous liquid spilled out" and quickly spread into the depot, across the floor to the stove, ignited and exploded. (Star News, 10/11/12). Several days later, two freight cars and a passenger car were once again placed on the depot site for temporary use as a station.

Soo Line documents (WCRR Building Record Book, no date) date the present 24 x 109 foot depot as having been built in November, 1913, from "house plans" used earlier in the construction of the depot at Park Falls, 60 miles north of Medford on the Ashland line. A work order dated May, 1927, directs the depot to be painted yellow.

Throughout most of the 20th Century, the railroad consisted of three tracks passing the depot site. These were from east to west (1) the mainline track, (2) a 2,800-foot

passing track extending north from a turn-out located opposite the depot agent's bay windows, and (3) a blind siding taking off from the passing track and extending north to the shore of the mill pond. A team track took off from the mainline north of Perkins Street, passed close along the rear entries of the stores lining the west side of Main Street, passed just to the east of the depot and rejoined the mainline north of Broadway. This track had permitted boxcar delivery of goods directly into merchants' basement store rooms.

West of the tracks and extending north from Division Street to the south shore of the mill pond was the yard of the Medford Lumber Company which operated a large saw and planing mill on the site. The company also operated a narrow-gauge logging railway that terminated in the Medford yard and tapped large pine stands around Perkinstown, 18 miles northwest of Medford in western Taylor County. This logging railway paralleled the Soo Line track to a point north of Allman Street, and then veered northwest toward Perkinstown. Parts of its right of way still are used as trails and forest access roads. The mill closed on August 5, 1926.

Passenger train service to Medford continued until 1960, consisting of a mail car and one or two coaches which ran north to Ashland in the evening and south in the early morning. The Soo Line maintained a freight agent in the depot until 1985 to service the accounts of Hurd Millwork Company, Weathershield, and four feed and fertilizer dealers. Maintenance of way gangs stored track materials in the depot for a time, but the building was vacant, unused and unheated after 1985. Through freight service north of Medford ended in 1987 when traffic was re-routed via Tomahawk, leaving Medford at the end of a branchline. In 1990, the track was removed from Allman Street in Medford to Prentice, including all sidings in downtown Medford, leaving only the former mainline track.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION.

A. General Statement.

1. Architectural Character.

The Medford depot is a largely unaltered example of vernacular railroad station design of the 19th and early 20th Centuries as used by the Soo Line Railroad. It is prototypical of small town passenger stations designed by the carrier for mass reproduction, limited capacity and inexpensive construction. Yet, the building affords a semblance of graciousness with its high ceilings, oak woodwork and broad eaves to shade the waiting passenger.

2. Condition.

The Soo Line did little to change the character of the depot following the construction of the concrete foundation and floor slab. It was spared the application of asphalt siding shingles which many Soo Line depots received after World War II. Modern lavatory fixtures and an oil-fired hot water furnace were installed in the 1940's, and several coats of beige paint were applied to the interior including the oak woodwork. Otherwise, the depot remains nearly unchanged from its original construction.

B. Description of Exterior.

1. Overall Dimensions.

The building measures 24 x 109 feet. The roof overhang measures 7 feet on the west, south and north sides, and about 6 feet on the east side where it was shortened to permit truck passage. The concrete passenger boarding platform, 12 feet wide, extended 350 feet north from the sidewalk on State Street. After acquisition by the City of Medford, this platform was shortened to the north side of the depot and now measures about 215 feet in length.

The railroad's property line, following the sale of the excess right of way to the City, is 15 feet either side of the center line of the mainline track. This places the property boundary about 2 feet from the west face of the depot. About 1-1/2 feet of the agent's bay and half the eaves overhang encroach onto railroad property. Wisconsin Central has agreed to permit the City and its successors to maintain the encroachment, and to permit access to the west face of the depot from railroad property solely for purpose of maintaining the building. Both pedestrian entries are on the west side of the depot, and so it will be necessary to cut a new public entry on the east or south side if and when the depot is converted to other use, in order to avoid trespassing on railroad property.

2. Foundations.

The depot rests on poured concrete frost footings over which a concrete floor has been poured. The corners of these footings have separated and partially broken away. The building lines are straight and plumb, however, and the depot shows few signs of settling.

3. Walls & Framing.

The walls and roof trusses are framed in 2" x 6" pine lumber. The Soo Line added spun glass insulation in the walls and ceiling. Generally, the depot appears in good structural condition, although by 1991 two small areas of roof had sustained dry rot damage due to leaking roof shingles. The exterior surfaces are 6" lap siding with 4" showing.

4. Appendages.

The agent's bay window on the west side extends about 3 feet into the boarding platform. The roof overhang has been notched in the center of the bay to permit the installation of a style 801 electrified semaphore signal, removed when the Soo Line closed the depot. A team loading dock about 42 inches tall and measuring about 25 feet square stood at the north side of the depot, accessed from the sliding door on the north end of the baggage room. The dock appeared to pre-date the poured concrete foundation, and was removed by the City to make way for a parking lot. The roof overhang was notched over the north end baggage door so that tall loads could be moved from the baggage room onto the dock without fouling the overhang.

5. Chimneys.

Two brick chimneys protrude from the roof on the ridge peak at either end of the tall roof section. The northerly chimney extends through the depot into the basement, and was used for the furnace. The southerly chimney extends only down to the ceiling above the men's waiting room, and no signs indicate how it may have been used. Both chimneys have concrete caps applied to them.

6. Openings.

All window sash and the sliding baggage doors appear to be original installations. The two pedestrian doors leading to the boarding platform appear to be replacements hung from the original sash. These doors confirm that the facade is the west side facing the track. The baggage door on the west side extends to the floor, while the north and east baggage doors begin at loading dock height, about 42 inches above the floor.

Windows are limited to the passenger end of the depot, except for a small, high window in the passage between the ladies' waiting room and the baggage room. Windows are 4/4 double hung pine sash units. Entry doors are 7' tall, 5-cross panel style with two pane 18"x 20" transom units. Baggage doors are one-piece and 7' tall with four inset panels, hung from inside the wall on glide-by tracks. When built, the exterior was painted yellow with a black asphalt shingled roof.

More recent Soo Line colors of light yellow cream with maroon trim still show in the exterior paint.

7. Roof.

The combination low-pitch roof utilized 1/2 pitch above the passenger area, 1/4 pitch over the freight room with flared eaves. The original galvanized steel ridge rolls and finials are present. Seven hip corner brackets, 31 - 7'x 9' eaves brackets and 3 smaller back bay brackets, have chamfered edges with modest, rounded corbels and provide a bit of architectural ornamentation. The building is 24 feet tall. The eave fascia is an ornate 5" molding. There are no eave troughs.

C. Description of Interior.

1. Floor Plans.

The original flooring was hard maple tongue and groove planking. The present floor is poured concrete throughout the building. The men's and ladies' waiting rooms are on either side of the agent's office connected by a narrow corridor and separated by a doorway. The small lavatory closets open directly into their respective waiting rooms. A tiny storage closet is at the top of the basement stairs, which are narrow and rise at the rate of 1:1. The warm baggage room opens into the unheated larger baggage area. A loading dock 24" high and built of heavy bridge timbers fills the northerly 18' of the baggage room. This facilitated transfer to and from the outdoor team dock at the north end of the depot.

The measurements of the various rooms are as follows:

Men's Waiting Room	19' x 23'
Ladies's Waiting Room	16' x 23'
Agent's Office	20' x 14'
Agent's Bay Window	13' x 3'6"
Lavatory Bay Protrusion	21' x 2'
Baggage Room Overall	23' x 56'
Warm Room	15' x 18'.

2. Walls & Ceilings.

Passenger waiting areas have lath and plaster walls. Oak wainscoting 42" tall has been applied to the inside and the outside of the three interior walls in the agent's office. The walls in the warm room are of pine ship lap planking with a basswood wainscot ceiling. The baggage room is open to the studs and rafters, although portions of the east and west walls have pine ship lap sheathing. The basement ceiling, walls and floor are of poured concrete.

3. Decorative Features, Trim & Hardware.

Doors and windows retain their original red oak facing trim of flat, non-ornamented design. The ticket window is noteworthy for having twin glass partitions 7' x 7' each framed with 10" x 10" mazed glass facing the corridor between the two waiting rooms. The original ornate wooden brackets support the wood shelves at the ticket windows which open from the agent's office into each waiting room and have canted sash that raise and lower. Window lifting handles and locks appear to be original, although most door knobs appear to have been replaced. The cast steel hook latches and track assemblies on the baggage room doors are original, as are built-in cabinets in the agent's office.

4. Mechanical Equipment.

The original heating system consisted of coal-fired space heaters which probably were removed when the depot was placed on its concrete slab. The present system utilizes an oil-fired hot water furnace in the basement dating from around World War II. Radiators in the upstairs rooms are connected by circulating pipes mounted outside the walls near the ceiling. There are no signs of light fixtures or circulating fans which may have been mounted from the ceilings. Currently, lighting is by florescent tube fixtures about 40 years old. The depot is not air-conditioned. The original lavatory fixtures and drinking fountain have been replaced.

D. Site.

1. General Site Orientation.

The depot site originally was part of the railroad's station grounds property in downtown Medford, which was 100' wide either side of the mainline center and which extended to the west edge of Main Street. Main Street is about 7' higher than track level and about 56' east of the east face of the depot. The railroad sold a string of shallow commercial lots facing on Main Street which are only 28 feet deep from the sidewalk line. These lots are occupied by Main Street businesses, except for one lot opposite the depot lavatories which is owned by the City of Medford and developed as a "mini-park." This gives the depot limited visibility from Main Street; otherwise, it is somewhat overwhelmed by Main Street commercial buildings which tend to tower over it.

A small, unimproved parking lot lies to the south of the depot accessible from State Street which connects Main Street to the Black River 2 blocks to the west. North of the depot is a municipal parking lot built in 1990 on former railroad right of way. The Wisconsin Central's former mainline track bounds

the depot to the west. This track serves four small shippers and ends near the north City boundary since being abandoned from Medford to Prentice. West of this track is another strip of former railroad right of way owned by the City, and beyond are commercial buildings facing onto Whelen Avenue. The depot and all of its surroundings were included in a tax increment finance (TIF) district in 1989, organized to help revitalize the downtown business district.

Immediately southeast of the depot is the former First National Bank of Medford (also former State Bank of Medford) building at the corner of Main and State Streets, built in 1924. To the northeast is the former Long Dairy building facing onto Main Street and built in 1945. Most of the other commercial buildings on Main Street date from the 1880's and 1890's.

Railroad outbuildings in the vicinity of the depot included a locomotive watering tower at the north end of the boarding platform east of the track, a pump house related to the water tower, and a small maintenance of way section house to the north near Broadway (State Trunk Highway 64.) These were removed in the 1950's, and only the depot was left standing. The railroad never operated a servicing facility for engines or cars in Medford.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION.

- A. Original Drawings (Soo Line, B&B Department) are included herewith.
- B. Photographic exhibit includes a west side view of depot taken around 1960. (Source: Soo Line valuation photo courtesy of Soo Line Historical Society.)
- C. Bibliography.
 - (1) Edwin Alexander, DOWN AT THE STATION. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., 1970.
 - (2) Patrick C. Dorin, THE SOO LINE. Seattle: Superior Publishing Co., 1979.
 - (3) Herbert Gottfried & Jan Jennings, AMERICAN VERNACULAR DESIGN 1870-1940. New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co, Inc., 1985.
 - (4) William Raney, "Building of Wisconsin Railroads," WISCONSIN MAGAZINE OF HISTORY, 1936. 19(4):387-403.
 - (5) Malcom Rosholt, TRAINS OF WISCONSIN. Rosholt, WI: Rosholt House, 1985.

- (6) MEDFORD CENTENNIAL 1874-1974. Taylor County Historical Society, Medford, WI.
- (7) STATE BANK OF MEDFORD 1890-1990. State Bank of Medford, Medford, WI., 1990.
- (8) MAINSTREET-MEDFORD, WISCONSIN. Northwest Regional Planning Commission, Spooner, WI., 1978.
- (9) CULTURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN WISCONSIN, Vol. 2. State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, WI., 1986.
- (10) "Medford County Seat, 1913 Taylor County Plat Map." George A Ogle & Co., Chicago, IL.
- (11) WISCONSIN CENTRAL RAILROAD BUILDING RECORD BOOK. No date, Private Collection, Soo Line Historical Society, Neenah, WI.
- (12) Minneapolis, St Paul & Sault Ste Marie Railway Co., Plan No. 16045, File #M-5-041.
- (13) Susan McCue Kuester, NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY, MEDFORD SOO LINE DEPOT. Report to National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, 12/21/1989. (NPS Form 10-900, OMB 1024-0018.)

D. Likely Sources Not Yet Investigated.

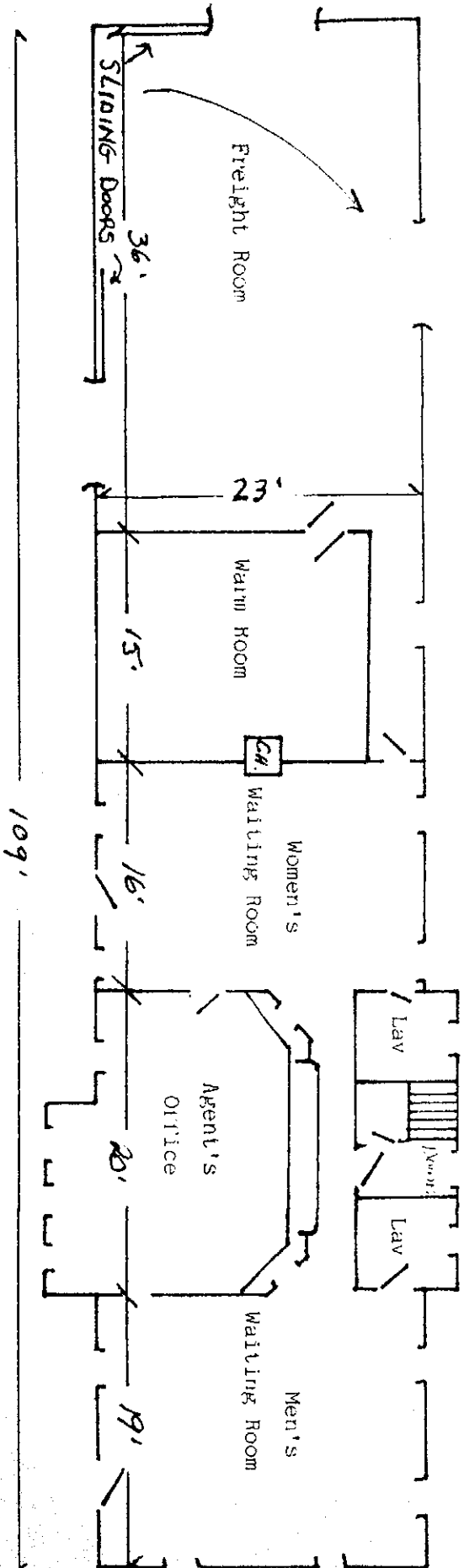
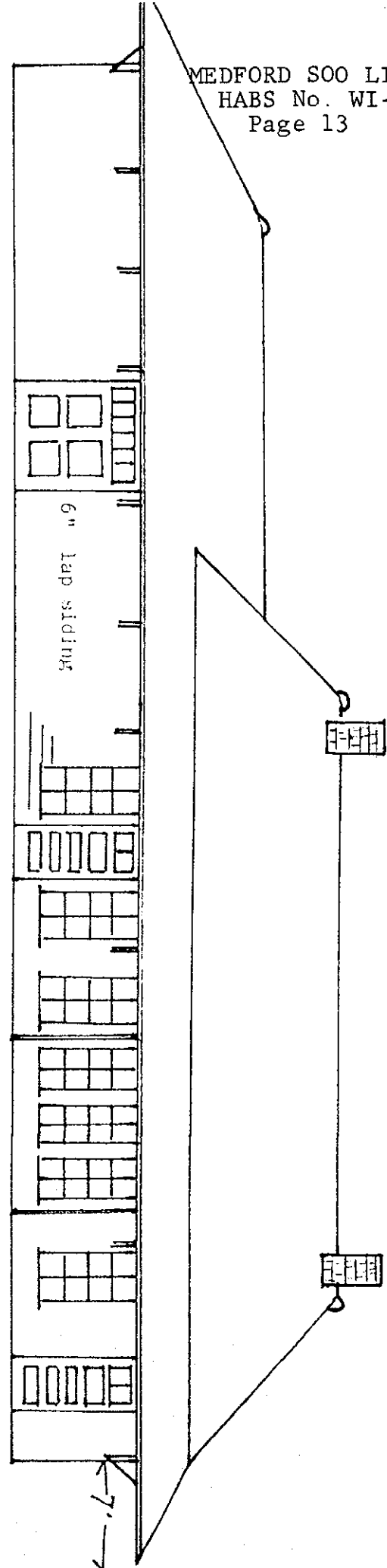
- (1) Wisconsin State Historical Society collection, Madison.
- (2) Dr. Walter Zeit photo collection. Glenn P. Doyle, Medford, WI.

Prepared By: William J. Graham
Historic Preservation Specialist &
Medford Community Planner
Northwest Regional Planning Commission,
302 Walnut, Spooner, WI. 54801.

February 5, 1992

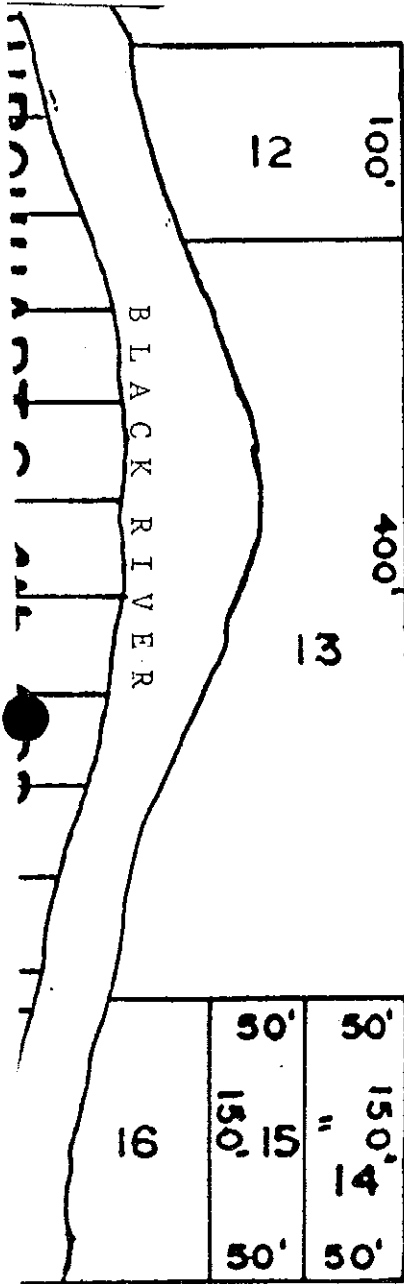
LISTING OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Elevation & floor plan of depot.
2. 1990 plat map showing depot location.
3. Soo Line line & grade drawing dated 3/12/49. (1" = 100')
4. Soo Line line & grade drawing. (1" = 400')
5. Sanborn Map of Medford, 1927.
6. " " " " , 1913.
7. " " " " , 1901.
8. " " " " , 1884.



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BROADW

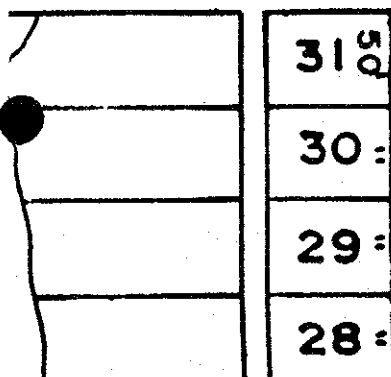


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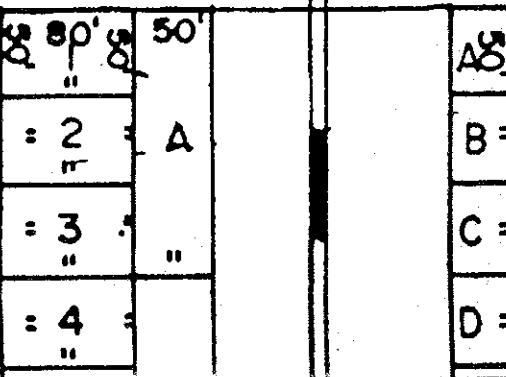
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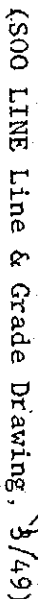
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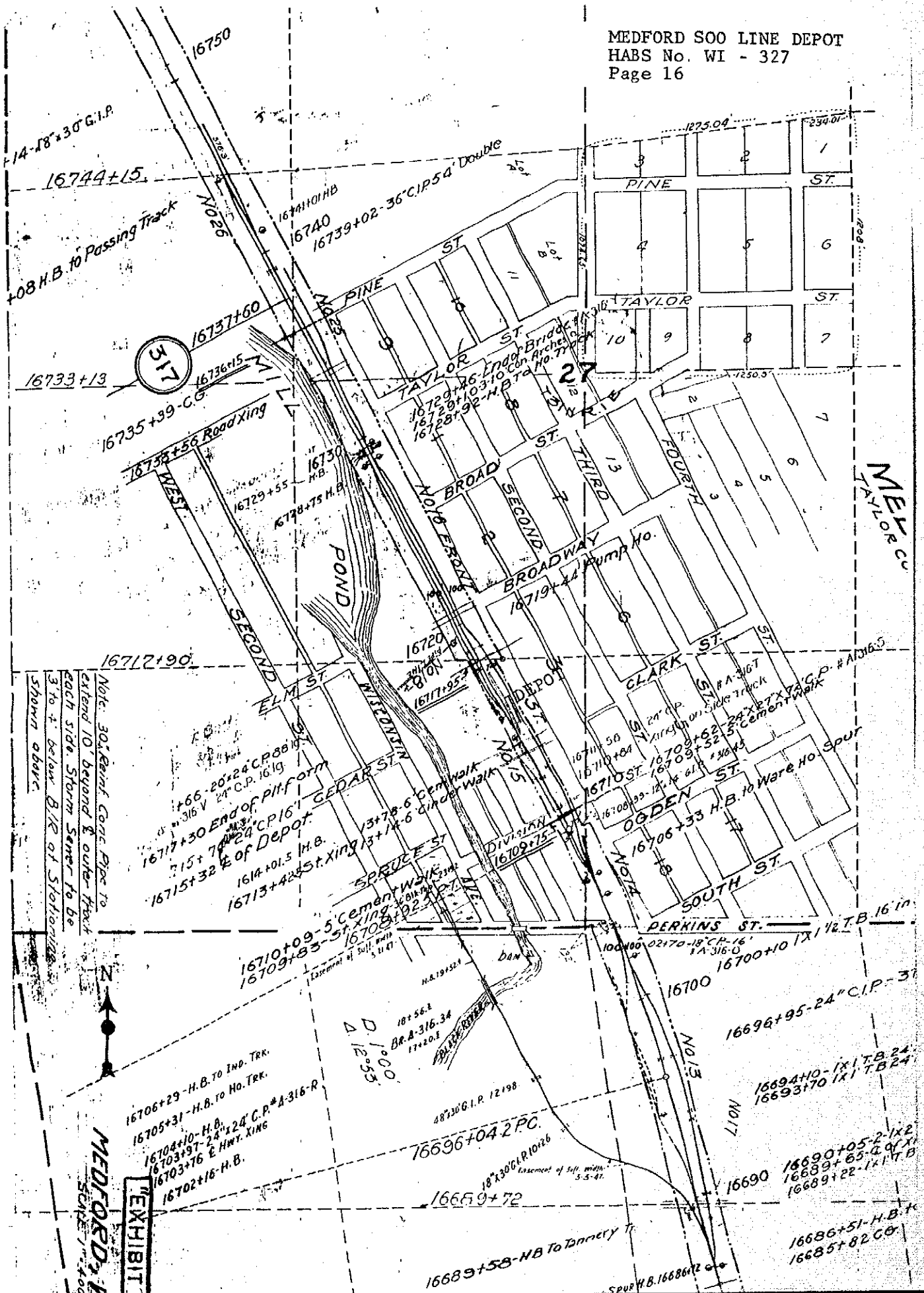
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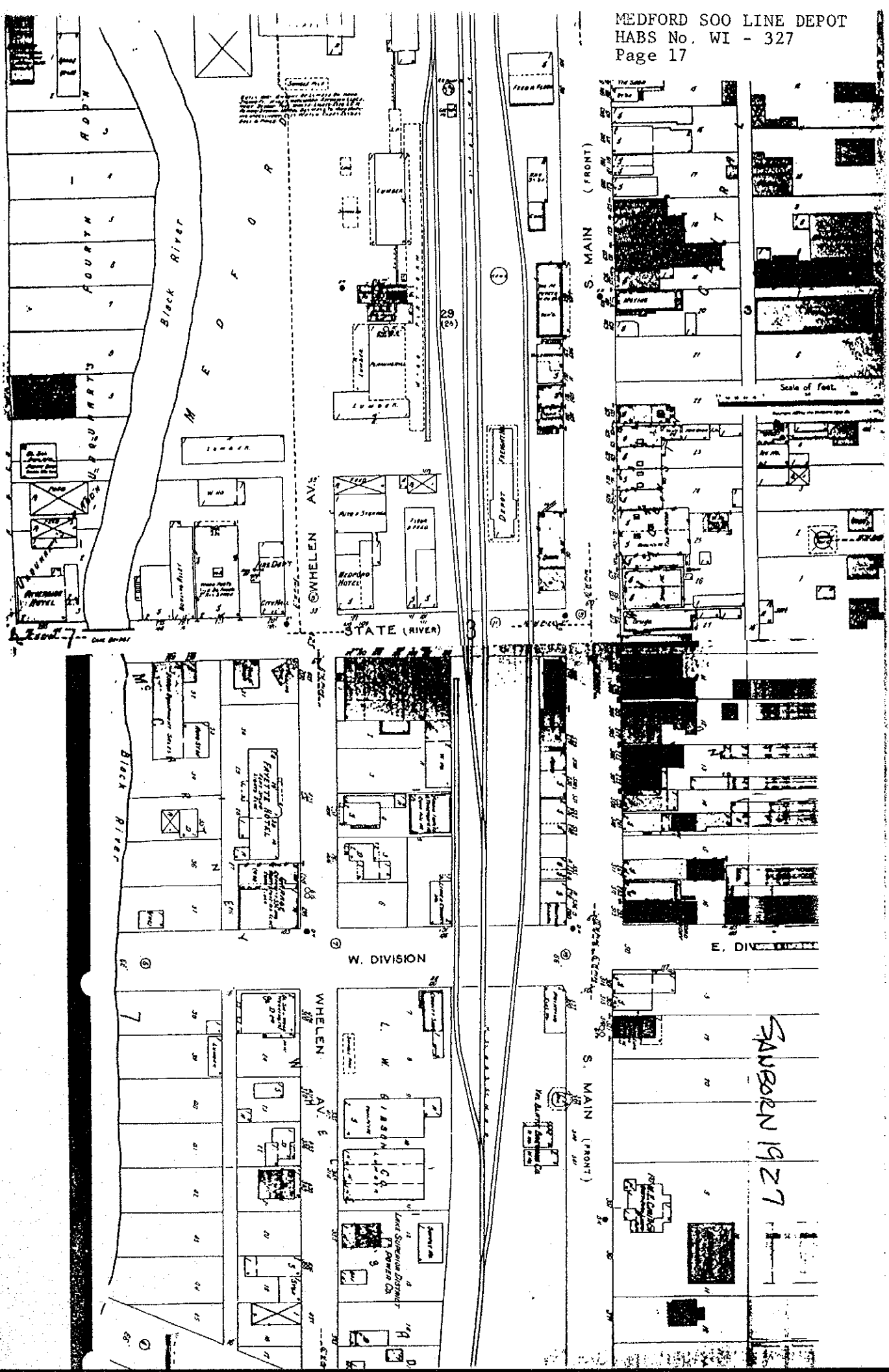
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Excerpt of 1990 plat map
City of Medford

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SANBORN MAP, 1913

